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Best practice for inclusive VET

(Views International)

Title of the best practice:

From Passive Recipients to Active Leaders: apiDV's Self-Determination Model for Inclusive VET and Employment

Country of the case study

In France, the inclusion of young people with disabilities within Vocational Education and Training (VET) is governed by a long-standing legal framework that has recently been modernized to ensure a seamless "school-to-work" transition. Historically, French disability employment policy originated after World War I to reintegrate veterans, with the architecture for continuing VET originating in the early 70s, eventually evolving into the Law of July 10, 1987[1]. This landmark legislation introduced a mandatory 6% employment quota for companies with more than 20 employees[2]. The research by Chareyron et al. (2024) emphasizes that this quota remains a powerful tool today, as large firms show nearly zero discrimination due to these financial incentives[3]. The creation of this quota brought to the establishment of funds for the initiatives for vocational training and qualifications for people with disabilities: *Agefiph* (for the public sector) and later, in 2005, the *FIPHFP* (for the public sector)[4].

Building on this historical foundation of quotas, French policy has evolved to prioritize individual inclusion and the continuity of support systems. Nowadays, the foundation of inclusive education and disability rights is strictly linked to the 2005 Disability Act (Loi n° 2005-102)[5], which established the

[1] Cedefop. (2024). *Vocational education and training policy briefs 2023 – France*. Cedefop monitoring and analysis of vocational education and training policies. http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/502879
[2] Blanc et al. (2022). An Overview of Disability Employment Resources in Europe. *Paris: FIPHFP*, pp. 25-26.
[3] Chareyron et al. (2024). Discrimination toward the visually impaired and quota policies in the labor market. LABOUR: Review of Labour Economics and Industrial Relations, 38 (4), pp. 558-583. https://doi.org/10.1111/labr.12282
[4] Blanc et al. (2022). An Overview of Disability Employment Resources in Europe. *Paris: FIPHFP*, pp. 25-26.
[5] Loi n° 2005-102, 11 février 2005. https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000000809647/

right to ordinary schooling[6]. This was significantly strengthened by the "Full Employment" Law of December 2023 (Loi n° 2023-1196)[7], which introduced the "Digital Backpack" (*Sac à dos numérique*). This initiative ensures the portability of technical adaptations – such as screen readers (NVDA/Jaws) or tactile displays – allowing to follow a student from the VET directly into their first job without administrative delay. Furthermore, the RQTH (Recognition of Disabled Worker Status) is now granted automatically to those already receiving disability education support (PPS). This administrative simplification removes the burden of re-proving disability status when transitioning into an apprenticeship or a first job[8]. As analyzed by Beuker et al. (2020)[9], this legislative evolution reflects a broader European trend toward making VET systems more agile while addressing the structural "unemployment gap" that persists for disabled workers. These studies suggest that while France has moved toward "mainstreaming", the challenge remains the transition from a highly protected educational environment to a competitive, performance-oriented labor market.

To ensure these tools function effectively, it is important to note that France has its own standards for accessibility. While international frameworks like the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) are typically used in the USA and across Europe, France operates under a specific national framework known as the *RGAA* (Référentiel Général d'Amélioration de l'Accessibilité). Based on Article 47 of the 2005 Disability Act, the RGAA is the mandatory technical standard for all public digital services and large private companies[10]. It translates the international WCAG criteria into a rigorous French methodology featuring 106 precise test criteria[11]. This system requires organizations to publish a "Declaration of Accessibility" and a visible compliance percentage, ensuring that VET training platforms and professional digital environments are technically compatible with the assistive software used by disabled workers (Loi n° 2005-102; Ordonnance n° 2023-859).

For a visually impaired individual, the educational journey is planned and managed by a PPS (*Projet de Personnalisation de Scolarisation*), a legally binding roadmap evaluated by the MDPH (*Maison*

[6] Cedefop (2024), p. 1. http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/502879

[7] Loi n° 2023-1196,18 Décembre 2023. https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFSCTA000048581936

[8] *Ibidem. (*Loi n° 2023-1196,18 Décembre 2023 https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFSCTA000048581936)

[9] Beuker et al. (2020). When Can a Disability Quota System Empower Disabled Individuals in the Workplace? The Case of France. *Work, Employment and Society*, 34(6), pp. 1109–1126. https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017020946672

[10] DINUM (Direction Interministérielle du Numérique). (2021). *Référentiel général d'amélioration de l'accessibilité (RGAA) - Version 4.1.2*. République Française. https://accessibilite.numerique.gouv.fr/

[11] Arcom (Autorité de régulation de la communication audiovisuelle et numérique). (2024). *Digital accessibility: The obligations of public and private players*. https://www.arcom.fr

Départementale des Personnes Handicapées) that coordinates technical and pedagogical adjustments (ICEVI-Europe, 2024)[12]. Within vocational high schools, this inclusion is often supported by ULIS (*Unités Localisées pour l'Inclusion Scolaire*), providing specialized support while students attend standard workshops to obtain national certifications like the *CAP* or *Bac Pro* (Cedefop, 2024)[13]. Beyond the classroom, specialized infrastructures support the transition from student life to professional autonomy. The transition to the labor market is facilitated by a specialized ecosystem. A major pillar of this is the Ressource Handicap Formation (RHF), a service co-funded by *Agefiph* that helps training centers (CFAs) adapt their tools and accessibility for learners[14]. Key support includes pedagogical aid, low vision rehab, and tailored tools, but full accessibility in VET pathways remains a goal. Every CFA now also appoints a *Disability Referent* to mediate between the student and the employer. These efforts are complemented by specialized institutions like CRDV (*Centres de Rééducation pour Déficients Visuels*), which offer "Social and Vocational Rehabilitation Services" (ESRP) specifically for visually impaired individuals, focusing on workstation ergonomics, Braille, and software training before or during their VET cycles[15]. However, experimental data from a 2020 correspondence test (Chareyron et al., 2024) revealed that visually impaired job applicants are still approximately 13% less likely to receive a positive response compared to non-disabled applicants[16].

While public institutions provide a structural foundation, private foundations and non-profit organizations play a vital role in refining specialized skills and fostering peer networks. Innovative partnerships also target specific professional skills. For instance, the *Givaudan Foundation*[17] has pioneered sensory-based training, such as perfumery and massage, while the *Air Liquide Foundation*[18] has partnered with *apiDV* (*Accompagner, Promouvoir, Intégrer les Déficients Visuels*)[19] to promote professional integration through peer-mentoring clubs like *actifsDV*. Furthermore, the organization *Handinamique* provides "360° support", including peer-mentoring and "Handicafés" (recruitment forums), to ensure that young graduates can bridge the gap between their diploma and their first job[20].

[12] https://icevi-europe.org/france.php
[13] Cedefop. (2024). http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/502879
[14] https://www.agefiph.fr/
[15] https://www.fagerh.fr/
[16] Chareyron et al. (2024)
[17] https://www.givaudan-foundation.org/projects/france-vocational-training
[18] https://www.fondationairliquide.com/integration-visually-impaired-people-france
[19] https://www.apidv.org/
[20] https://handinamique.org/

Context

apiDV (Accompagner, Promouvoir, Intégrer les Déficients Visuels) is a French national association dedicated to ensuring equal access to education, employment, and culture for the visually impaired. Operating within the robust French legal framework (2005 Disability Act), it serves as a specialized intermediary between students and the decentralized French Higher Education/VET landscape. The association's infrastructure includes a team of 8 professional transcribers, a governance committee of 12 student volunteers, and a pool of 75 volunteer coaches. Within this framework, apiDV plays a critical role as a continuity actor, ensuring that accessibility support remains stable as learners move between training centers, universities, apprenticeships, and diverse employment contexts.

Problem and motivation

While the 2005 Disability Act mandates inclusion, the primary challenge lies in the high level of institutional autonomy, where accessibility measures often stop at institutional boundaries. This fragmentation creates a "postcode lottery" for the 3,000 visually impaired students in France, who face the risk of training interruptions due to inaccessible content or administrative delays.

apiDV plays a critical role as a continuity actor within this highly decentralized system. It ensures continuity of support when learners move between training centers, universities, apprenticeships, and employment contexts. This function is particularly relevant for VET learners, whose pathways frequently combine classroom-based training, work-based learning, and professional immersion across different organizations. By compensating for local resource shortages, apiDV acts as a vital bridge between protected education and the competitive labor market, preventing drop-outs and ensuring that rights on paper translate into tangible professional opportunities.

Description of the practical approach

Unlike traditional top-down educational interventions, apiDV has implemented a dual-track support system designed to foster autonomy by focusing on both academic and professional "socialization".

In 2024, the provider fundamentally shifted its student structure (Campus DV) to a self-determination model. Instead of students being passive recipients of aid, they now co-lead the service through a committee of 12 students working alongside 2 staff members to identify gaps in university services

and co-organize support activities. This change ensures that the transition from a protected school environment to a competitive market is managed through increased student agency. To support this agency with the necessary tools, the practice follows Universal Design principles by advocating for RGAA digital accessibility across all higher education platforms, ensuring environments are inclusive by design rather than by exception. On a technical level, a team of 8 professional transcribers adapts complex educational materials into Braille, audio, and tactile diagrams (crucial for STEM subjects). This technical foundation is then paired with human support, where 75 volunteer mentors from the ActifsDV program provide the human resource needed for job-readiness, including mock interviews and workplace mediation. This dual approach ensures that students have both the accessible tools and the professional guidance needed to succeed, supporting 60 students and 75 graduates annually.

Accessibility

apiDV addresses accessibility through three pillars:

- **Physical:** The association provides advising on local scouting and the implementation of assistive orientation tools (e.g., partnerships with the University of Lyon and Okinea).
- **Pedagogical**: Beyond transcription, the association offers human tutoring for visual descriptions in complex subjects like biology, economy, and management, filling the gap where automated tools fail.
- **Digital:** Advocating for *RGAA* (French Accessibility Standard) compliance, **apiDV** ensures that VET platforms and remote examination systems are technically compatible with screen readers, promoting an "inclusive by design" framework.

Results

The impact of this practice is measured by its national reach and specific educational outcomes:

- **Learner Reach**: Annually, the program supports 60 students in higher education and 75 job seekers/graduates through career transitions.
- **Classroom Impact**: Students are empowered to complete high-level certifications (CAP, Bac Pro, and University Degrees) because they receive complex STEM diagrams and exam subjects in high-quality Braille or digital formats that match their sighted peers' materials.

Work-Based Learning and Transition to Employment

For learners engaged in apprenticeships or alternance schemes, apiDV provides targeted preparation and mediation support. This includes anticipating accessibility needs in the workplace, preparing learners to communicate effectively with Disability Referents, and supporting the adaptation of training and evaluation materials used jointly by employers and training centres (CFAs). This support is essential in VET pathways, where learning outcomes depend simultaneously on educational institutions and private-sector workplaces. Although apiDV does not formalize partnerships through employer agreements, its model promotes mainstream inclusion where accessibility becomes part of ordinary employment relations. Mentors act as informal intermediaries who clarify accommodation needs and address concerns related to productivity, helping employers fulfill legal obligations while fostering sustainable inclusion. These mentors provide the human resource needed for workplace mediation and workstation ergonomics, directly supporting the student in communicating their technical requirements to a company's Disability Referent.

This preparation, reinforced by mock interviews and recruitment fair support, ensures that technical VET skills translate into professional success. The effectiveness of this approach is evidenced by a positive exit rate in 2024: 50% of the 75 participants have successfully secured jobs or advanced training. The transition to the labor market is facilitated by the *ActifsDV* ecosystem, which focuses on empowering individuals to navigate the professional world and the French 6% mandatory employment quota with autonomy. By preparing visually impaired learners to articulate their needs and by supporting them through mentor-based mediation, apiDV indirectly strengthens employers' capacity to implement inclusive practices. This approach avoids dependency on special contracts and instead promotes mainstream inclusion, where accessibility becomes part of ordinary employment relations rather than an exception.

Outcome Indicators (0, 6, 12 months)

While apiDV does not implement a formal longitudinal monitoring system with fixed indicators, outcomes are tracked through continuous mentor feedback, follow-up with supported individuals, and annual aggregation of employment and training results. This qualitative and practice-based monitoring approach allows apiDV to adapt its support dynamically to emerging barriers in VET and employment contexts.

Sustainability

The practice is deeply rooted and structurally sound. The student services have been operational since the early 1990s, and the ActifsDV mentorship program has maintained a consistent impact for 17 years. The 2024 renewal of the Campus DV structure ensures that the practice remains adaptive to the latest French legislation, such as the "*Digital Backpack*" initiative.

Transferability

To replicate this practice, a VET provider or organization should secure the following minimum conditions and key steps:

1. **Staff Competency:** Sensitivity training for professionals on the specificities of visual impairment.
2. **Technical Resources:** Access to transcription expertise and digital accessibility (RGAA) auditing tools.
3. **Governance:** Establishing a **student-led committee** to ensure services remain user-centric.
4. **Strategic Partnerships:** Linking with specialized NGOs to recruit a **volunteer mentor network**, which keeps the practice cost-efficient.

Essential Roles

- **The Disability Referent:** Acts as the mediator between the student, the teachers, and the employer.
- **The Student Steering Committee (10-12 members):** Leads the design of support activities and identifies institutional gaps.
- **The Transcription Expert:** Ensures all pedagogical materials are accessible before the start of the curriculum.
- **The Mentor Network (Volunteers):** Professionals (sighted or visually impaired) who guide the student through job-readiness.

Resources and Time Needed

- **Human Resources:** 1 to 2 dedicated coordinators (FTE) and a pool of 50+ volunteers.
- **Technical Tools:** Licenses for screen readers (NVDA/Jaws), tactile graphics embossers, and digital accessibility auditing software.

- **Budgetary Focus:** Funding should be prioritized for **high-quality transcription** and **community events** that foster peer-to-peer networking.

Cost efficiency

(N/A)

Success Factors

The success of this practice is driven by the meaningful engagement of the students themselves, whose involvement in governance ensures that services directly address the evolving barriers of the French higher education system. A critical factor is the technical excellence of the transcription team, which provides the high-level adaptations necessary for students to succeed in demanding STEM and VET subjects. Furthermore, the hybrid human-resource model—combining a dedicated professional staff with a robust network of 75 volunteer mentors—allows the association to provide personalized, high-value coaching that remains cost-efficient. Finally, the strategic visibility gained through national advocacy and partnerships (such as with the University of Lyon or apiDV peer-mentoring clubs) ensures that the practice is integrated into the broader French disability employment ecosystem. The practice is effective also because it operates at the intersection of VET providers and the private sector.

Challenges and Solutions

The primary obstacle is the decentralization of French education, which creates inconsistent accessibility across regions. apiDV solves this by acting as a national "knowledge hub," ensuring support remains continuous even when a student moves between institutions.

To address employer bias and the logistical fear of workstation costs, the ActifsDV program uses mentors to provide "proof of concept." By showcasing successfully integrated professionals, they dismantle stereotypes and equip students with the self-advocacy skills needed to manage their own workplace adaptations.

Finally, to manage budgetary constraints and the high cost of specialized transcription, the association utilizes a hybrid resource model. By leveraging over 75 volunteer mentors for professional coaching, apiDV can prioritize its financial resources for high-level technical needs, such as Braille and complex STEM diagrams, ensuring the practice remains both high-impact and cost-effective.

Reason for Selecting the Practice for WIN

apiDV deserves a place on the W.I.N. list as a standout model of systemic intervention and empowerment. apiDV's practice is particularly relevant because it operates at the intersection of VET providers and the private sector. Rather than relying solely on institutional reforms, the model equips learners with self-advocacy skills and prepares employers to engage with disability inclusion pragmatically. This makes the practice highly adaptable to private-sector environments, where flexibility, performance expectations, and time constraints shape inclusion dynamics. It transforms the "passive" right to education into an "active" path to employment through the following pillars:

- The association achieves a consistent 50% positive exit rate for its job-readiness participants—a significant figure given that the unemployment rate for visually impaired individuals in France is nearly 50%. Its dual focus on high-level STEM transcription and professional mentoring provides a measurable "success bridge" from school to work.
- By shifting to a self-determination model (Campus DV) and using Universal Design (UDL) principles for digital accessibility, it ensures that disabled learners are co-creators of their inclusion, not just beneficiaries of aid.
- The practice is backed by 30 years of operational experience and a transparent methodology (the "5 A's"). Its success is validated through annual monitoring of learner outcomes and a proven track record of securing complex accommodations in high-stakes environments like national exams and corporate offices.
- The model is highly replicable across borders. It does not rely on massive government infrastructure; instead, it uses a hybrid human-resource framework (professional staff + volunteer mentors) that any NGO or VET provider can adapt. Its reliance on digital standards (RGAA/WCAG) makes it compatible with international digital accessibility frameworks.

Contacts for more information and/or references

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